

HURRICANE HARVEY: Community Liaison Team – Jasper/Newton Counties – Sept. 10, 2017

Jasper/Newton CL team includes:

- David Bryan
- Jeremy Ford
- Devin Pollock
- Jim Stevens

The team had a great initial discussion with Billy Smith, Newton-Jasper Emergency Operations Manager. Mr. Smith related to us that the counties began moving to recovery stage on Friday. He did provide information that five people died in the two counties from storm-related events. He said they have had some business/industrial interruptions due to the absence of raw materials at the paper mill and other businesses. He also mentioned there was significant damage to rail lines in the counties. Many of the support functions for the two counties have been combined including emergency operations and health departments. They have a 40-member Local Emergency Planning Commission that serves Newton, Jasper and Sabine counties.

He had received the fact sheets from EPA the previous day and has already posted information on the LEPC website and the links to significant storm-related fact sheets through Twitter and Facebook. He described the counties as significantly rural with most of the counties' population have private drinking water wells and on-property septic systems. We mentioned that other counties were providing private well testing and he indicated that there had been some talks with the county extension agent but he doubted that they will have that option. He indicated that private well testing will be an issue.

He talked about his concerns that FEMA, Red Cross and other agencies have not been to Jasper to talk with the LEPC nor have services been offered to the county. He hopes to have a FEMA Service Center located in Jasper that would include the support agencies necessary for the people in the county to recover, including but not limited to FEMA, USDA Rural Development, state health agencies, state/federal environmental agencies, and Small Business Administration). He did mention that there were some areas that were still flooded but most of the residents are starting to return to their homes and begin the recovery process.

Previous conversation had asked whether the Superfund sites in the two counties had been checked by EPA or state personnel. Team is contacting the state site manager for information.

Mr. Smith also told us that there had been significant loss of livestock.

CONCERNS:

- Services not available and EPA is the first government agency to talk with him about any recovery activities.
- FEMA Individual funding will be needed for residents to recover.
- Small Business Administration assistance will be necessary to get some of the local businesses back to normal operations
- Fact sheets are being used but the county would need help to get the word out through local media (Beaumont Enterprise (daily), several weeklies, Beaumont television stations and local radio. Would like to offer EPA assistance in getting the information out to media through the Unified Command PIO mechanisms.

The team plans to return to Jasper to talk again with Mr. Smith and his deputy.

Team is concerned about the guidelines for how "deeply" involved we can be to work with the LEPC and communities.

Please let us know if you have questions.

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